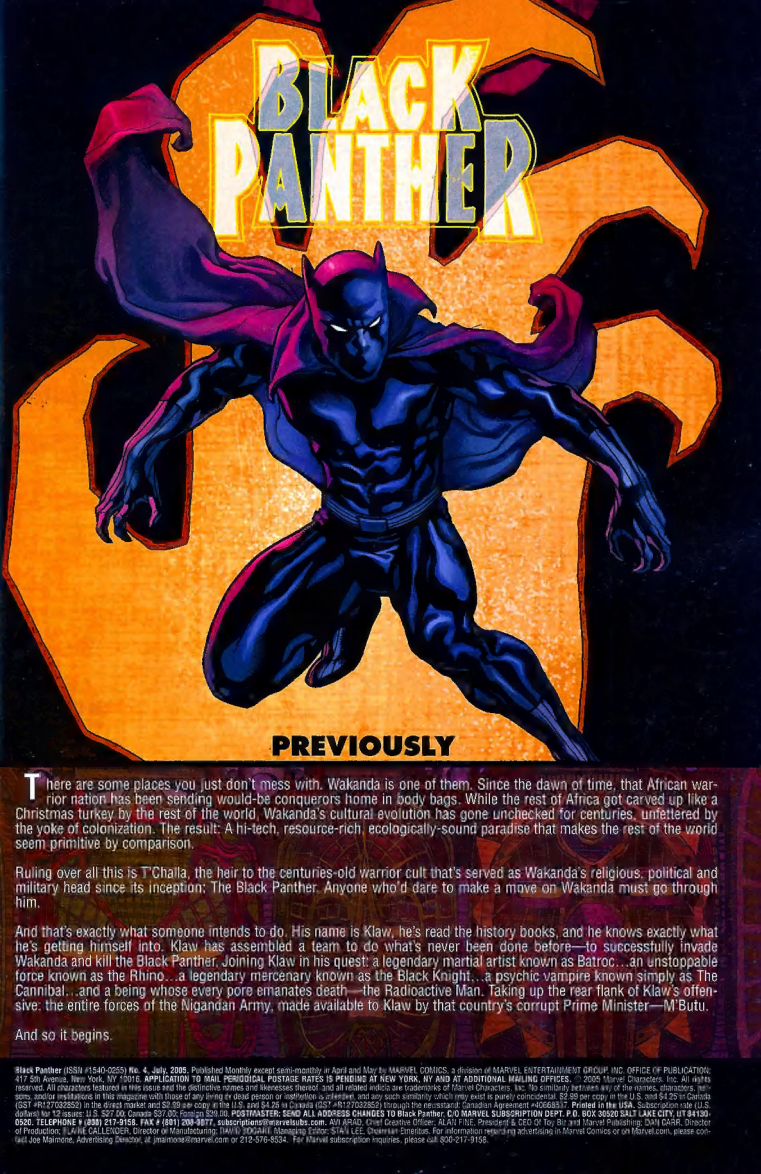

PREVIOUSLY

There are some places you just don't mess with. Wakanda is one of them. Since the dawn of time, that African warrior nation has been sending would-be conquerors home in body bags. While the rest of Africa got carved up like a Christmas turkey by the rest of the world, Wakanda's cultural evolution has gone unchecked for centuries, unfettered by the yoke of colonization. The result: A hi-tech, resource-rich, ecologically-sound paradise that makes the rest of the world seem primitive by comparison.

Ruling over all this is T'Challa, the heir to the centuries-old warrior cult that's served as Wakanda's religious, political and military head since its inception: The Black Panther. Anyone who'd dare to make a move on Wakanda must go through him.

And that's exactly what someone intends to do. His name is Klaw, he's read the history books, and he knows exactly what he's getting himself into. Klaw has assembled a team to do what's never been done before—to successfully invade Wakanda and kill the Black Panther. Joining Klaw in his quest: a legendary martial artist known as Batroc…an unstoppable force known as the Rhino…a legendary mercenary known as the Black Knight…a psychic vampire known simply as The Cannibal…and a being whose every pore emanates death—the Radioactive Man. Taking up the rear flank of Klaw's offensive: the entire forces of the Nigandan Army, made available to Klaw by that country's corrupt Prime Minister—M'Butu.

And so it begins.

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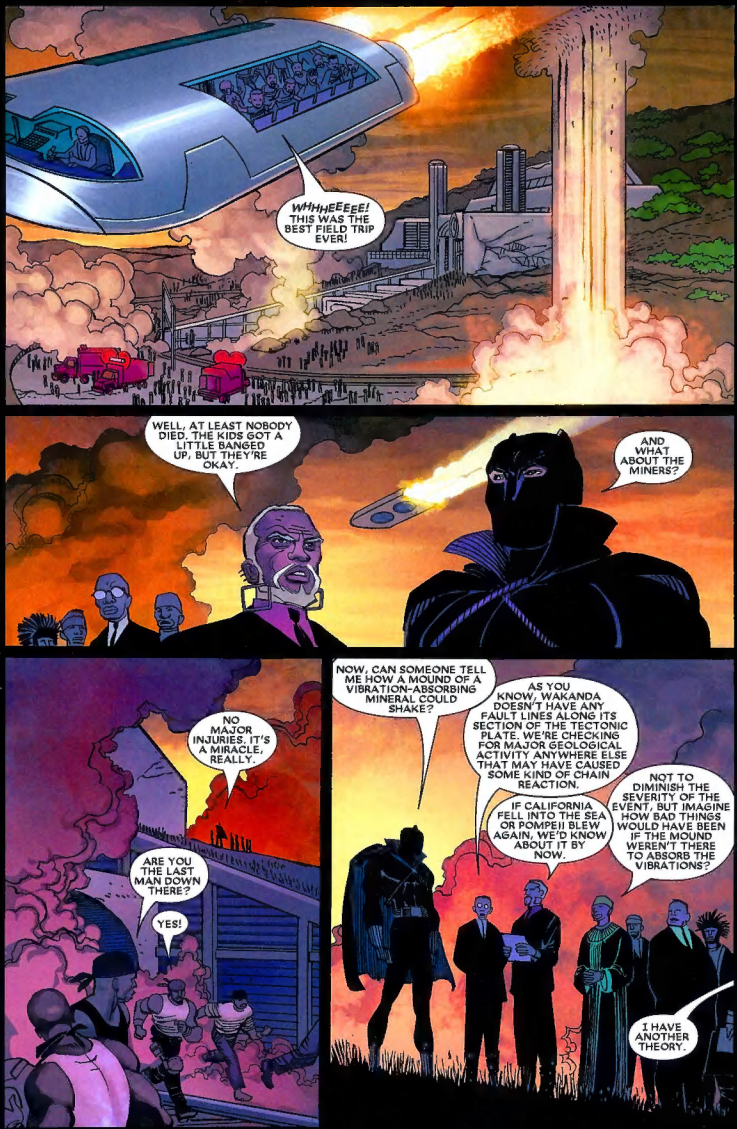
OKAY CLASS, SETTLE DOWN. NOW WHAT DO WE CALL THIS PLACE?
WHO IS THE BLACK PANTHER? PART FOUR
REGINALD HUDLIN WRITER
JOHN ROMITA JR. PENCILLER
KLAUS JANSON INKS
DEAN WHITE COLORS
VC'S RANDY GENTILE LETTERS
CORY SEDLMEIER ASST. EDITOR
AXEL ALONSO EDITOR
JOE QUESADA EDITOR IN CHIEF
DAN BUCKLEY PUBLISHER
THE GREAT MOUND!
CORRECT! AND WHAT DO WE GET FROM THE GREAT MOUND?
VIBRANIUM!
AND WHAT DOES VIBRANIUM DO?
IT AH...ABSORBS VIBRATIONS?
VERY GOOD! AND WHY IS THAT USEFUL?
RRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR
WHAT'S GOING ON, MS. MBOYE?
I HAVE NO IDEA...

RRRRRRRRRRR
WATCH OUT, BOYS, I'M ABOUT TO BRING THE WHOLE PLACE DOWN WITH THIS SWING!
WHAT THE HELL DID YOU JUST DO, BOY?
IT'S AN EARTHQUAKE! RUN!
CHILDREN! GRAB THE RAIL!
PANTHER GOD! PLEASE SAVE ME!

ARE YOU HURT?
NO, SIR.
HA! LOOK AT THOSE FOOLS PANIC! IT WORKED!
REPORT, IGOR.
I DID AS YOU SAID. I FOUND THE ATOMIC WAVELENGTH OF THIS PIECE OF METAL YOU GAVE ME, THEN REACHED OUT AND FOUND A LARGE COLLECTION OF IT NEARBY. THEN I PLAYED WITH IT. JUST A LITTLE BIT.
WELL DONE.


WHHHEEEEE! THIS WAS THE BEST FIELD TRIP EVER!
WELL, AT LEAST NOBODY DIED. THE KIDS GOT A LITTLE BANGED UP, BUT THEY'RE OKAY.
AND WHAT ABOUT THE MINERS?
NO MAJOR INJURIES. IT'S A MIRACLE, REALLY.
ARE YOU THE LAST MAN DOWN THERE?
YES!
NOW, CAN SOMEONE TELL ME HOW A MOUND OF A VIBRATION-ABSORBING MINERAL COULD SHAKE?
AS YOU KNOW, WAKANDA DOESN'T HAVE ANY FAULT LINES ALONG ITS SECTION OF THE TECTONIC PLATE. WE'RE CHECKING FOR MAJOR GEOLOGICAL ACTIVITY ANYWHERE ELSE THAT MAY HAVE CAUSED SOME KIND OF CHAIN REACTION.
IF CALIFORNIA FELL INTO THE SEA OR POMPEII BLEW AGAIN, WE'D KNOW ABOUT IT BY NOW.
NOT TO DIMINISH THE SEVERITY OF THE EVENT, BUT IMAGINE HOW BAD THINGS WOULD HAVE BEEN IF THE MOUND WEREN'T THERE TO ABSORB THE VIBRATIONS?
I HAVE ANOTHER THEORY.

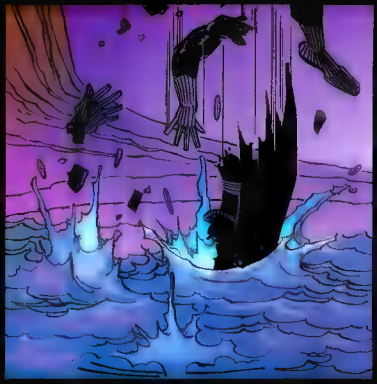
I THINK THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH OUR VIBRANIUM.
AND YOUR TWO YEARS OF STUDY IN NUCLEAR PHYSICS MAKES YOU EXPERT ENOUGH TO CONTRADICT OUR SCIENCE OFFICER, SHURI?
PLEASE PARDON MY LACK OF TACT, BUT YES, I'D LIKE TO INVESTIGATE ANOTHER POSSIBILITY. I'D JUST NEED A SMALL TEAM--OF ACTUAL EXPERTS, THANK YOU--TO WORK WITH ME DOWN IN THE MINE SHAFT--
OUT OF THE QUESTION!
BESIDES BEING DIRTY AND DANGEROUS TO YOU, I AM NOT RISKING THE LIVES OF OTHER MEN IN CASE OF A SECOND CAVE-IN. CASE CLOSED.
T'CHALLA--!
WHY WON'T YOU CONSIDER MY-- HUMPH!
WHY ISN'T HE AT THE HOSPITAL?
HE REFUSED TO LEAVE UNTIL HE COULD SHOW HIS GRATITUDE.
NOW CHILDREN TELL ADULTS WHAT TO DO?

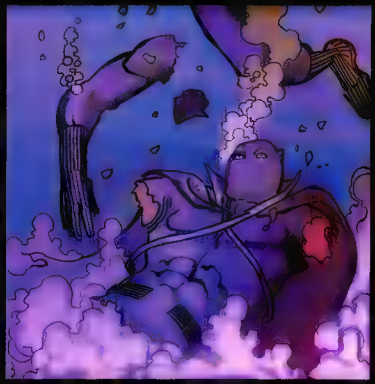
NO, HIS PARENTS TOLD HIM WHAT TO DO.
PANTHER GOD, I--
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
K'SHAN.
K'SHAN. I AM A MAN.
YOU ARE THE BLACK PANTHER! SACRED GOD OF OUR CLAN! WHEN WE MOVED TO THE CITY, I NEVER DREAMED THAT I WOULD BE BLESSED WITH YOUR HOLY PRESENCE.
GOD WORKS THROUGH ME, THE SAME AS YOU. THERE IS NO FEAT I ACHIEVE THAT YOU ARE NOT CAPABLE OF.
...AND THAT'S WHY HE'S--
--THE BLACK PANTHER. I KNOW. HE'S BEEN MY BROTHER MY WHOLE LIFE. I'M JUST TRYING TO DO MY PART.

GOD WORKS IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS.
CENTURIES AGO, WE BROUGHT CIVILIZATION, COMMERCE AND GOD TO AFRICA. WE DRAGGED THEM INTO THE 20TH CENTURY.
IN CHAINS.
SSSHHH!
NOW AT THE DAWN OF A NEW CENTURY, AFRICA NEEDS OUR HELP MORE THAN EVER. AND HERE STAND REPRESENTATIVES OF FOUR GREAT NATIONS COMMITTED TO DO JUST THAT....
...FRANCE....
...BELGIUM...
...AMERICA...

...AND GREAT BRITAIN. WHILE IT IS REGRETTABLE THAT FORCE IS NECESSARY TO ACHIEVE OUR GOALS--
--SOMETIMES YA GOTTA KICK A LITTLE BUTT IN THE NAME OF JEEZUS!
THE PEOPLE OF AFRICA WANT GOD IN THEIR LIVES, AND THIS EBONY BLADE SHALL GRANT THEM THEIR WISH.
YOU PRAY WHILE WE STEAL--IT ALWAYS WORKS!
SHUT UP! WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?
I'M A PROFESSIONAL, NOT A ZBALOT.
I'M AWARE MANY OF YOU ARE FIGHTING FOR DIFFERENT REASONS.
SOME OF YOU MAY BE HERE FOR GLORY, WEALTH, REVENGE...OR JUST REGULAR MEALS.
BUT WHATEVER YOUR REASON, KNOW THAT THE HAND OF GOD GUIDES US ALL IN THIS HOLY CRUSADE!
AAAA-MEN!

COME OUT! THE BLACK PANTHER IS READY!
REALLY, LITTLE MAN? I DON'T THINK YOU'RE READY AT ALL.
AAARRRGGHH!
YOU ARE NOT WORTHY.



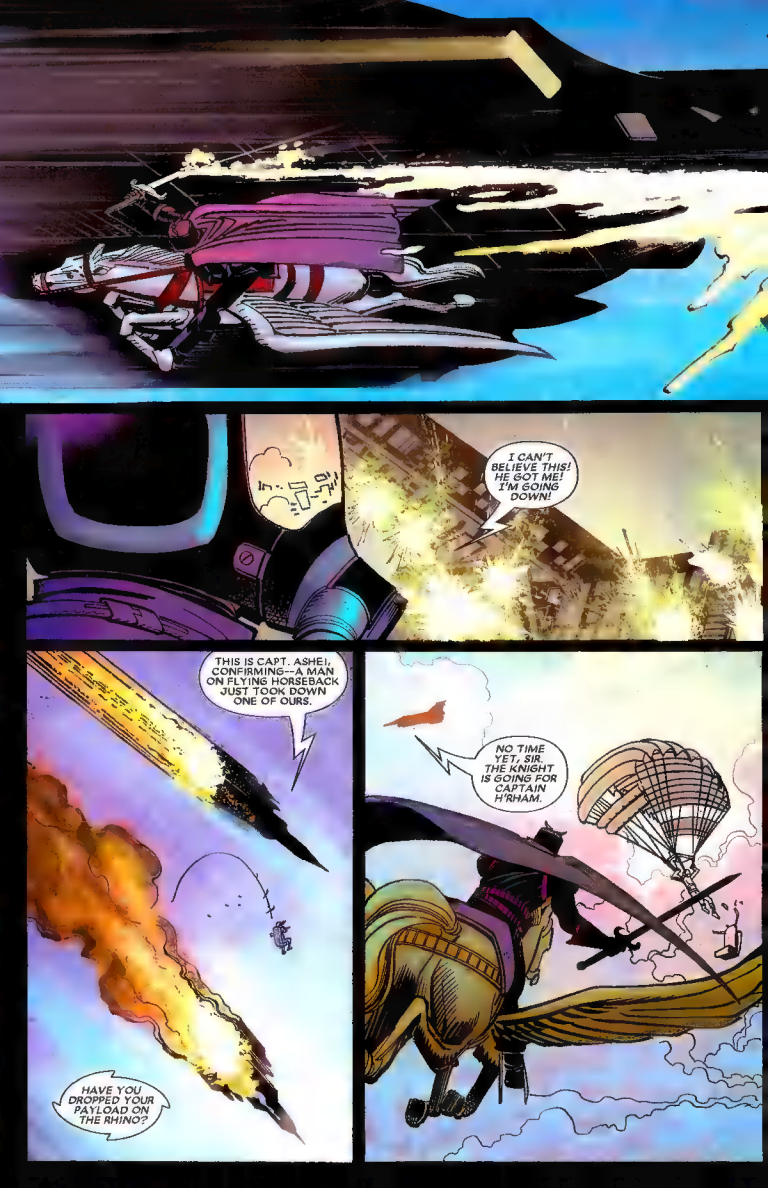


DON'T WORRY, MY KING.
WE WILL SAVE YOU.
BUT I'M BROKEN.

WE CAN HEAL YOU.
SEE? YOU'RE SAFE WITH US.

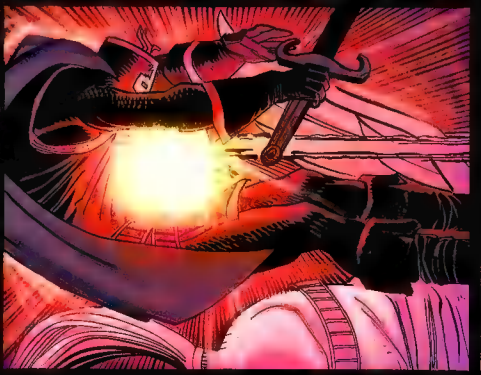
■ THERE ANYTHING ELSE WE CAN DO FOR YOU?
ANYTHING?

YOUR HIGHNESS.....
....HMMM? YES. WHAT IS IT?
IT'S AN EMERGENCY.
AMANDLA!
STAND DOWN, W'KABI. WHAT'S GOING ON?
WE'VE GOT A BOGEY COMING OUR WAY. WE'VE GOT A FEW FUZZY IMAGES FROM CAMERAS LOCATED AT THE FAR WEST EDGE OF THE KINGDOM.
MY HEAD OF SECURITY COULDN'T DEAL WITH A WILD ANIMAL WITHOUT ME?
IT'S JUST AN ANIMAL. SEE? IT'S ON TWO FEET. LIKE A MAN. AND IT'S DOING A STEADY 35 MILES PER HOUR.

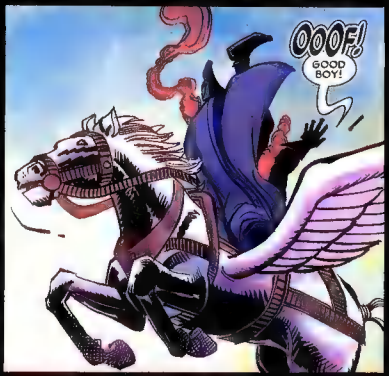

I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS! HE GOT ME! I'M GOING DOWN!
THIS IS CAPT. ASHEI, CONFIRMING--A MAN ON FLYING HORSEBACK JUST TOOK DOWN ONE OF OURS.
HAVE YOU DROPPED YOUR PAYLOAD ON THE RHINO?
NO TIME YET, SIR. THE KNIGHT IS GOING FOR CAPTAIN H'RHAM.

YOU'VE GOT TO TAKE HIM OUT QUICK. YOUR PRIMARY TARGET WILL HIT THE CITY BEFORE WE CAN SCRAMBLE ANY OTHER FIGHTERS.
INCOMING!
LOOKS LIKE A LARGE MISSILE IS HEADED STRAIGHT TOWARD THE GREAT MOUND.
EVACUATE THE MOUND IMMEDIATELY. E.M.S. CREWS STANDING BY. GET A DOZEN JETS IN THE AIR.

HARD TIME SHOOTING STRAIGHT? YOU'RE BETTER OFF PRAYING FOR SALVATION FOR YOUR HEATHEN SOUL BEFORE YOU MEET YOUR MAKER.

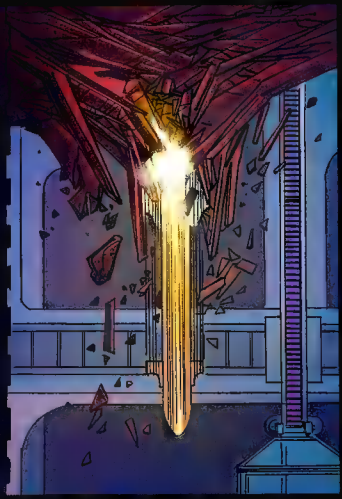


THAT'S ONE DOWN. NOW FOR THE RHINO.


OOOF!
GOOD BOY!

IT LOOKS LIKE YOU WERE RIGHT, PRINCESS. THERE WAS SOME TYPE OF SUBATOMIC RIPPLE THROUGH THE VIBRANIUM DEPOSITS. BUT HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE WHEN--

BREEEEEBREEEE!
UH-OH.
LOOKS LIKE OUR LITTLE UNAUTHORIZED EXCURSION HAS BEEN DISCOVERED.
DON'T WORRY. I'LL TELL MY BROTHER IT WAS ALL MY FAULT.



OH, NO...!

IT HASN'T EXPLODED YET.
MAYBE IT WAS A DUD.
MAYBE IT'S NOT A BOMB.
IS--
-COUGH COUGH-
--IS EVERYONE ALL RIGHT?
I...CAN'T MOVE, PRINCESS. I'M PINNED.
PUT THIS CLOTH OVER YOUR NOSE AND MOUTH. I'LL BE RIGHT BACK WITH HELP.

WHAT IS THAT?
A MANNED SHIP. IT MUST BE WHAT FELL.
MAYBE HIS RADIO STILL WORKS-- I'LL CALL FOR HELP.
NO!
DON'T WORRY, I'VE GOT A WRENCH IF THERE'S TROUBLE...
YOU THERE--SIR! ARE YOU ALRIGHT?
YOU'RE... GREEN.

AND YOU'RE... DEAD.
MY FIRST KILL OF THE DAY.
BUT NOT THE LAST MAN TO DIE AT THE HANDS OF *THE RADIOACTIVE MAN.*

SHOWTIME, ROSS! REPORT TO THE WAR ROOM A.S.A.P.!
WHAT'S UP?
YOUR LITTLE FIELD OF SPECIALTY JUST GOT HOT.
JELLO SHOTS?
...THEY'RE USING NEIGHBORING NIGANDA AS A LAUNCHING PAD FOR THEIR INVASION OF WAKANDA, BUT WE'RE CERTAIN THE NIGANDANS DON'T HAVE THE STONES TO PULL THIS ONE OFF ON THEIR OWN.
THEN WHO *IS* BEHIND IT?
THE MEN ARE BEING LED BY PROFESSIONAL MERCENARIES EMPLOYED BY ULYSSES KLAW, A HIGH-LEVEL BELGIAN ASSASSIN.
THERE IS NO WAY A BUNCH OF WAFFLE-MAKERS ARE GOING TO PLAY US OUT OF POSITION IN WAKANDA! WE NEED TO SEND IN SUPPORT TROOPS TO AID OUR WAKANDAN ALLIES RIGHT AWAY!
AND WHERE ARE THOSE TROOPS COMING FROM? OUR TROOPS ARE SPREAD TOO THIN ALREADY. WE JUST DON'T HAVE ENOUGH BODIES.
OH, THAT'S THE ONE THING WE HAVE PLENTY OF. WE'VE GOT MORE THAN ENOUGH BODIES TO INVA--I MEAN, ASSIST WAKANDA!
TO BE CONTINUED...

MAIL TO THE KING!

I don't know if people even realize just how important a book like BLACK PANTHER really is. There are a lot of good books out there, capable of laying claim to their fair share of critical or financial success, but none of them have what PANTHER does. Unfortunately, comics featuring prominent minority characters are hard to come by, so seriously, from a brother that's made comics his official habit for over ten years, this whole thing just feels good, ya know? To hear that retailers can't keep the book on the shelves, to see the message boards on fire, to feel the excitement and the interest this project is garnering, means a lot to me on a personal level. Because it signifies that with the proper creative team, and the right marketing scheme, diversity has a true place within the mainstream comics market.

My hope is that BLACK PANTHER becomes the staging point for a fresh wave of minority characters, an opportunity to see more black heroes, female heroes, or Hispanic heroes, because the success of BP proves that an audience is out there. One that's lying in wait for just the right material that speaks to them, not only from an emotional point of view, but from a physical one as well. Let the exceptional work of Hudlin, Romita Jr., Janson, and White mark the beginning of something new. And keep up the good work.

Brandon Thomas
C.C. Hills, IL

Thanks, Brandon. And keep up the good work, yourself. If anyone out there doesn't know, Brandon's no stranger to T'Challa, having written an issue of FF UNLIMITED featuring the Black Panther.

I'm 37 years old and this is my first letter to a Marvel comic. I just wanted to thank Marvel for giving Panther another chance. What a way to start my celebration of African Heritage Month this year! Although the new, simpler style of writing and art will take some getting used to on my part, both this character and this team are worth the effort. I think Reggie & Co. are attempting to produce comics that will be read and cherished in the 21st century by new audiences. I'll consider myself a fan for the duration, and I'll count his BLACK PANTHER #1 as my first 21st-Century comic.

Todd Steve Burroughs, Ph.D.
Hyattsville, MD

I read the BLACK PANTHER #1 relaunch with an open mind. I love the character and loved Priest's run. Honestly, I haven't liked much of the usual Marvel hype surrounding this new series (obviously aimed at Marvel's perceived core audience of backwards-hat-wearing skateboarders), but I am totally willing to give the new writer a chance. The result was mixed feelings.

First, it seems that Reginald Hudlin can write comics. Marvel feels that only Hollywood writers can write decent comics; the truth is usually the opposite. I'm always wary of a new Hollywood writer, mostly because the aforementioned hype machine has wildly overrated their talents. But Mr. Hudlin can visualize and write a coherent script. So far, so good. The penciling was fine. I did not care for how emaciated and anemic-looking John Romita Jr.'s Spider-Man was, but he doesn't make the same mistake with these characters.

The scripting started to break down about halfway through. Specifically, the meeting in the White House. The suggestion that a top military White House official would call blacks "jungle bunnies" is ridiculous and speaks to Mr. Hudlin's hatred of Bush more than his writing abilities. Really, President Bush has a much more diverse staff than any of his predecessors and the most diverse Cabinet that has ever existed. Is this President really going to tolerate racism in his staff, General or not? This scene did not ring true.

The white industrialists attacking Wakanda in the 19th century were a little more believable. This reflects the greed and racism of the time and besides, black tribes were also having attacking. Wakanda is a rich nation, and as such is subject to attack throughout history by all sorts of forces. I bought this.

Then there was the Cap thing. I suppose there was a chance that on a really good day T'Chaka could take Captain America, but the scene just reeked of the 'all black people are good, all white people are bad' attitude that permeated the story. And of course, our racist white General ferociously denies that such an event actually took place. I suppose this is Mr. Hudlin's way of telling fans like me that if we question that the great Captain America can be beaten (by a black man), we're just as racist as the General. Sorry, not true. It's just that it's hard to beat Cap, period, regardless of the race of the antagonist. I'm still not sure if I buy that, but I suppose it's possible. Then there was the fact that Cap's shield was the wrong one for 1944. Of course it's minor, and no, it didn't affect my enjoyment of the story, but it's just another way that NuMarvel in general, and the editor specifically, ignore any comic printed before 2000.

It's too early to tell if BLACK PANTHER is going to be a good adventure comic or a soapbox screaming that every white person (and super hero) is, knowingly or not, a racist. Please note Tony Priest on this; his run occasionally touched on racism, but he was never heavy-handed about it. I was impressed when Priest, a self-admitted liberal, depicted President Bush as a savvy leader during his original BP run. Priest managed to tell a story first, and stick in his personal agenda mostly not at all. Can this team do the same?

Again, because of my love for the character, I'll stick around for the first storyline. I'll never forget how cool I thought the Panther was in FF during the '60s. And even cooler when he took off his mask and revealed that he was black (as you well know, black heroes were almost nonexistent at the time). So to the entire creative team, especially the writer and editor: story first, personal agenda nowhere.

Jerry Smith
Burlington, KY

Ho-kay, Jerry. You grind quite a few axes with that letter—we lost count by the third paragraph, in fact. We think it's only fair to let Reggie respond for the record. Reg'?

I respectfully disagree with you about JR Jr.'s Spider Man—you wanna see scrawny? See Ditko's Spidey—and I love Ditko's work! There is no doubt John is doing a great job on this book. That said:

Regarding your point that the White House sequence "is ridiculous and speaks to [my] hatred of Bush more than [my] writing abilities": Whoah. I've been black for a long time and I've met prejudiced people in every walk of life—regardless of race, creed, social position or political affiliation. Acknowledging their existence does not imply that whatever group they belong to automatically shares their beliefs. As for whether such talk could occur in such rarefied circles, plenty of Presidents, from Woodrow Wilson to Lyndon Johnson to Richard Nixon, have been documented saying racist remarks. Do I think it's in the realm of possibility that a White House staffer from either the Clinton or Bush Administrations (remember, the story does not specify who is President) might make a racist comment? Yes. Would such a remark be tolerated? Well, in my story, the black woman who is running the meeting – Dondi Reese—summarily dismisses the idiot without breaking a sweat.

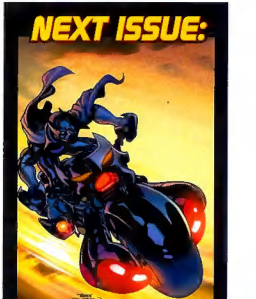
Regarding the Cap thing: I don't engage in Hulk vs. Thing debates, and I won't engage in Cap vs. Panther debates either. I am in the fortunate position of writing BLACK PANTHER, and the Panther beat Cap. Now, don't get me wrong, I love me some Captain America—I spent 200 bucks on one of those fancy shield replicas on eBay—but Panther beat Cap, baby. Live with it.

Regarding your assertion that the whole story was saying "all black people are good, all white people are bad," all I can say is, this remark says more about you than the comic I wrote. Aren't the first "bad guys" in the book black invaders with body part trophies from previous raids? If you think I'm vilifying the administration, isn't that a black woman in charge? Clearly, all black people aren't "good" in this issue. So maybe the problem, in your eyes, is that there aren't enough "good" white people? Why? Captain America may have lost the fight with the Panther, but he certainly doesn't say or do anything to betray the principles he stands for. And when one guy in the meeting says something stupid, everyone looks at him like the fool he is, and once he is dragged away, intelligent conversation resumes—so why hand the entire room as racist because of one guy's comments? I wouldn't presume that about them, so why would you?

Finally, regarding your concern that this book will become a "soapbox screaming that every white person (and super hero) is, knowingly or not, a racist," let me say this: By necessity, many black people spend long hours analyzing the complex permutations of racism, while some of their white brothers and sisters have a harder time discussing the awkward and painful feelings the topic evokes. But sticking our heads in the sand only makes the problem worse. Until we develop a common language and a shared understanding of each other's experiences, these conversations will generate more heat than light. I don't want to preach to the converted. I don't want to preach at all. But I do want to challenge readers of every political stripe. I appreciate the fact you're willing to stick around. The more you read, you'll see I'm an equal opportunity offender. The more you read, the more you'll see I'm all about kick-@$$ action and heroics. And if you think Stan and Jack didn't have a personal agenda, you're wrong. Like The Beatles, they used their artistic genius to make the world a better place—and they succeeded.

-- Reggie
www.hudlinentertainment.com

And on that note…



CORY SEDLMEIER
ASST. EDITOR

AXEL ALONSO
EDITOR

JOE QUESADA
CHIEF

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